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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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INFO DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC
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ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000033

SIPDIS

INTERIOR PASS FISH AND WILDLIFE
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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA CONFIRMED AT PETTING ZOO

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

11. SUMMARY: On January 3, 2008 the Israeli Veterinary and Animal Health Services (IVAHS) in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) confirmed Avian Influenza (H5N1) in birds at a Binyamina kindergarten petting zoo in North-Central Israel. Currently, there is no indication that any humans have contracted the disease. The chairman of the Public Health Services says that the Ministry of Health (MOH) continues to examine the source of the outbreak. The MOH announced that there is no risk in continuing to eat chicken and eggs. This is the first case of confirmed H5N1 in poultry since the initial outbreak of Avian Influenza in Israel in March 2006. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Of the 32 birds at the petting zoo (20 chickens, 8 ducks, and 4 pigeons), 18 chickens were found dead on the morning of January 3rd. The remaining birds were culled by the Israeli Veterinary Service which ran epidemiological tests at the Beit Dagan Veterinary Institute to confirm H5N1.

13. (U) The initial discovery was made by a kindergarten teacher who called a veterinarian. Neither the kindergarten staff nor the children have been given preventive medicine since they did not come in direct contact with the birds. Ten to twelve veterinarians-including the caretaker of the petting zoo-who all had direct contact with the infected birds, were given tamiflu as a precautionary measure. The hospitals in the area have been alerted to look for anyone reporting flu-like symptoms; however, there is no indication that any humans have contracted the disease. One child who attends the kindergarten was hospitalized in Hadera, near Binyamina, with a bronchial infection, but not bird flu.

14. (U) In order to prevent the spread of infection, all poultry within three kilometers of the infected site will be destroyed. MOA has put all poultry coops and hatcheries within a ten-kilometer radius under quarantine. Poultry flocks within this radius will be monitored and undergo active surveillance for signs of disease. Removal of poultry from the areas under quarantine is prohibited. MOA officials are monitoring traffic and inspecting vehicles on the main roads leading from Binyamina and all side roads are closed to prevent smuggling. All laboratory tests that have been sent to Beit Dagan from poultry houses within the three-kilometer radius have been negative for signs of avian flu thus far.

15. (SBU) Within the three-kilometer radius, there are two farms that house grand-parent stock of turkey. This is the first generation, and the most sensitive, expensive and difficult to replace in the line of production. Culling this stock could cause a shortage of turkey meat in 12-18 months. For these reasons, special dispensation has been granted to these two farms within the 3-kilometer radius. Rather than culling the birds immediately, they will be tested every 72 hours for H5N1, until it is determined that they are no longer a threat for Avian Influenza. There was also a small flock (2600) within the 3-kilometer radius of "table egg layer" chickens that were culled even though they tested negative for H5N1.

¶6. (U) The MOA is responsible, by law, to compensate coop owners whose poultry is destroyed. According to press reports, the chicken-growers feel that the current amount of compensation offered is inadequate to completely re-stock, and have asked for an increase of at least 25%.

¶7. Post will continue to monitor the situation closely.

MORENO